TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16TH, 2022

KILEY GOSSELIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
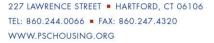**PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Kiley Gosselin, and I am the Executive Director at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC). We are a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. PSC staffs and manages both the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent end homelessness in Connecticut and the HOMEConnecticut Campaign to ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to a range of affordable housing choices in all communities. Each campaign brings together over 100 state and non-profit partners to identify and implement data-driven policy solutions and prepare consensus legislative agendas.

We support the preservation of Fiscal Year 2023 allocations to the Department of Housing (DOH). These crucial investments directly impact homelessness in CT. By maintaining funding at the current appropriated amounts will help to ensure service delivery and crisis management are provided at current levels of operation and will not lose capacity due to reductions in the Housing/Homeless Services and Homeless Youth line items.

We respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions in addition to the Governor's proposed budget adjustments for DOH:

An increased investment in the [Rental Assistance Program (RAP)](#) by at least $20 million in FY23. RAP vouchers are a necessary tool to address housing insecurity and assist severely cost burdened renters struggling under the weight of the state's high housing costs. More than 220,000 renter households spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs, and 114,000 renter households spend more than half of their income on housing costs. In January 2022, there were over 3,600 households on the waitlist for RAP in Connecticut. Black residents make up only 12% of CT's population, yet 56% of Black renters are housing cost burdened. The expansion of RAPs is a critical step toward addressing Connecticut's racial inequities, lifting households out of poverty, and improving their quality of life. Moreover, RAPs are a flexible, cost efficient housing subsidy that allows a household to move where it is best for them to access employment, childcare or other needs. A RAP pays the difference between 30-40% of the renter household income and the fair market rent. RAPs also ensure a basic level of housing quality is met and support the private rental market in Connecticut.

Providing an additional $2.5 million to establish and implement a [proven eviction prevention partnership.](#) We know that evictions are increasing in CT. Between January 1st, 2020 through December 8th, 2021, there was approximately a 32% increase in eviction filings, and an approximately 45% increase in eviction executions. This program seeks to combine services to address the risk facts of homelessness with

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legal services to stabilize tenancy. Partners will accept referrals and conduct outreach, prioritizing those who are most likely to enter the homeless system. Once enrolled, households will receive comprehensive individualized casework, legal services (through Right to Counsel), and financial assistance (UNITECT when applicable) to address their unique needs and the underlying causes of housing instability. This program is estimated to serve 100 households per year and will focus on five (5) court districts across the state based on volume of eviction filings. By implementing this program, CT can make homelessness a rare experience, reduce the costs incurred to provide emergency shelter and other homeless services, and mitigate the disparate impact eviction has on black and brown communities.

An additional investment of $2.3 million to provide critical staff infrastructure [support for the Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) and 2-1-1](.). Without a stable funding source, the number of people utilizing Connecticut's shelter system has decreased by 57%. Currently, the CANs rely on DOH's discretionary use of the Community Investment Account (CIA) proceeds for funding. As an emergency response system, a more stable and permanent funding source is needed to support its infrastructure. The CANs are crucial to keeping families out of shelter, reducing costs in the homeless response system, and increasing housing stability for CT families and individuals. Without funding, thousands of Connecticut residents would be put at immediate risk of homelessness every year. Recent one-time CARES funding helped to fund this gap over the past year, and we saw a more than 20% decrease in the state's by-name-list during this time. Increased CAN funding means better homelessness prevention, more consistent staffing, and faster intake and faster housing matching for households experiencing homelessness.

The CT Community Nonprofit Alliance's long-term plan to restore at least $461 million to community nonprofits. Failure to support our essential front-line staff, over time will result in a dilution or denial of critical services to highly vulnerable individuals and families. This will result in more households cycling in and out of our homeless service system and other institutional systems of care, resulting in higher costs to the state. Ensuring that providers have the basic resources they need to do their jobs has never been more important. If we are committed as a state to making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time, supporting our housing and homeless providers is essential.

And providing an additional $13.34 million in FY 23 to provide homeless and housing service organizations [funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for frontline workers], increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology. Members of the Reaching Home campaign that are both providers of these services and organizations that support providers have raised significant concerns regarding their ability to attract and retain employees, pay their employees a living wage, maintain reasonable caseload sizes, and support staff training. There has been no cost of living adjustment (COLA) on DOH and DMHAS state contracts for many years, leaving providers squeezed to provide the same level of service to clients. Reports of high turnover and of budgets stretched to the max are frequent. Many providers report that front-line staff experiencing housing instability need to access the same services and programs they are assisting others to access. Appropriate funding of these contracts assists households in exiting homelessness, but also in providing critical wrap-around services to ensure that permanently housed households remain so.

In addition, please support the allocation of $50 million in American Rescue Plan recovery funds reflected in the Governor's budget to support and invest in the creation of 350 additional housing units affordable to households with incomes between 30% and 50% of area median income. Access to safe and affordable housing is fundamental to economic recovery, education, healthcare, and opportunity and myriad data and research support this. We support targeted funding for the construction of housing affordable to those with the lowest incomes as housing affordable to these families is the most difficult to fund from other

traditional sources. Multiple recent needs assessments have shown that the need for affordable units is highest for those households below 50% of area median income.

We know that homelessness is solvable. Connecticut can make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time by investing in housing, supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents.

Sincerely,

Kiley Gosselin
Executive Director
Partnership for Strong Communities